



Judge Drops Case

Sexual abuse charges against Reynold Buono, a former Milton Academy teacher, were dropped in December after a judge ruled the statute of limitations had expired

By Ally Donnelly and Douglas Moser • Published on January 25, 2019 at 6:43 pm



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Forbes says it was devastating after charges against

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- 2** Buono were dropped by a judge in December.
- 3** The judge ruled the statute of limitations had expired on the case and prosecutors did not have enough corroborating evidence.

Jamie Forbes' initial hesitation to come forward encapsulates why thousands of sexual abuse victims stay silent for decades or their entire lives.

"My first reaction was no. Why would I want to go through that process of digging all these things up, and to what end?" Forbes said in an exclusive interview with the NBC10 Boston Investigators.

After recently coming forward, accusing a former teacher at Massachusetts' Milton Academy of sexually abusing him for months in the early 1980s, he watched as his fear came to life in a Dedham courtroom.



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- Yes, I'm a current listener
- Yes, I've listened in the past
- No, I've never tuned in to them
- Does not apply / Other

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Man Reveals Abuse Allegations Against Private School Teacher

Charges of sexual abuse against Reynold Buono, the former Milton Academy teacher, now 73, were dropped after a judge in Norfolk Superior Court ruled on Dec. 26 the statute of limitations had expired on the case.

"It just felt very disorientating really," Forbes said.

Forbes' ordeal—deeply and painfully personal and yet not at all unique—is the latest in a litany that includes unknown numbers of children assaulted by teachers and priests, and that too often ends with no charges after accusations surface years beyond what the law allows.

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Advocates, including elected officials, have pushed for years to lengthen the statute of limitations, allowing older cases to be prosecuted in court.

"IT WAS JARRING."

It had been more than 30 years since Forbes set eyes on Buono. The images of the charismatic drama teacher in an argyle sweater and the disheveled man in a prison jumpsuit were hard to reconcile.

"Well, he's obviously changed quite a bit since the last time I'd seen him. It was jarring," Forbes said.

Buono pleaded not guilty last August to felony child rape charges, filed after Forbes accused Buono repeatedly assaulting him when he was a 15-year-old student at Milton Academy.

According to Milton Academy, Forbes was the first of more than a dozen former students to accuse this teacher.

In letters to alumni, Milton has repeatedly said they "...failed students...", that the headmaster at the time "...had some knowledge of the abuse..." but did not fire Buono until the school said he confessed to abusing a different student five years later.

Buono then left the country, landing in Thailand. No one went to the police.

"HOW COULD THIS POSSIBLY HAPPEN TO ME?"

Confusion, shame and fear, Forbes said, pushed him to bury his secret for decades.

"How could this possibly happen to me? What did I do?" Forbes said. "It just becomes much easier to blame yourself in many ways."

At the time, Forbes said he told his best friend about alleged abuse that started on a school bike trip through Italy. When it continued back at Milton, Forbes and his friend told adults who went to the administration.

Nothing happened.

"That really infuriates me. And it's part, in many ways, of what fuels me," Forbes said.

Years later, in the wake of other private school scandals, Forbes decided to come forward. That decision launched an investigation at Milton and eventually led to 18 other former Milton students

coming forward, all claiming Buono had abused them too.

Forbes's case is the only one, so far, that has yielded criminal charges. And those charges now hang in the balance while lawyers debate state law.

In Massachusetts, prosecutors can bring charges in a child sex abuse case at any time, but if more than 27 years have passed since the alleged incident, the law requires additional independent evidence to corroborate the alleged victim's claim.

On Dec. 26, Superior Court Judge Thomas A. Connors dismissed the charges against Buono he said because prosecutors did not have enough independent evidence to move forward.

Forbes had not spoken publicly since the indictment, not wanting to interfere with the criminal case.

But now he is breaking his silence because he said he is worried the case will die quietly, with a chilling effect on victims.

"My fear is it will be just another example that people can point to and say, 'This is why it's not worth it,'" Forbes said.

A QUESTION OF LAW

In a statement sent to the NBC 10 Boston Investigators, a spokesperson from Milton Academy, told us, "This ruling does not in any way exonerate Buono or excuse his heinous deeds...We again offer our sincerest apologies for the failure of this institution to protect students."

Prosecutors believe they not only have the corroborating evidence they need but also plan to argue in an appeal that the clock for the 27-year legal deadline should have been paused.

They say state law does not count the time a suspect is out of state, meaning Buono's 30-plus years in Southeast Asia should not count for the statute of limitations.

"People come forward years and years later, and why shouldn't they have that opportunity years later when they finally feel that they can even talk about it?" said state Sen. Joan Lovely, D-Salem.

Lovely, who is a sexual abuse survivor, filed a bill last week to follow at least eight other states and eliminate any statute of limitations for child sex crimes.

"If a district attorney believes that they have enough to bring it forward, then they should be able to," she said. "The law as it set up right now protects the perpetrators, I want to protect the victims."

Kate Frame, a former state prosecutor turned defense attorney, said she does not think Lovely's proposal is a good idea, saying the law has to balance the rights of both the accuser and accused.

"When so much time has passed," Frame said. "It's very difficult to defend against an allegation, witnesses being gone, documents being gone, no crime scene, memories faded."

Forbes, for one, is adamant the details of his abuse are still clear.

"It's seared in my mind," he said.

But Lovely has filed her bill twice before, only to watch it die in committee, just as sexual abuse scandals have unfolded across the country and here in Massachusetts, she hopes the bill will gain traction.

A judge is expected to hear from both sides in Buono's case next month, though it is not clear when he could hand down a decision.



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